

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 10, 2013 **Agenda Item:** 2014-15 Biennial Season Setting Scoping

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Informational

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

While regional and other FWP staff routinely engage the public throughout the year, the formal season setting process has historically started with the public introduction of proposals in December of odd years. Opportunity for public comment, and public introduction of alternative proposals has been available at this December meeting. Adoptions from this same December meeting are then made available for public comment through most of January. This includes more than 40 meetings, hearings, and open houses across the state. Final proposals and adoptions take place in February so that regulation booklets may be available for spring bear and turkey seasons and nonresident deer and elk license application deadlines.

While the biennial season-setting process has successfully generated considerable public comment to FWP and the Commission, one criticism was the lack of public participation opportunity prior to initial proposals being framed by FWP. In response to this criticism, FWP has inserted an additional scoping step during the summer and early fall prior to the December meeting. This scoping includes: 1) two additional FW Commission presentations or discussions (August and October); 2) public comment opportunities thru Sept. 9; and 3) one open house in each administrative region.

Public Involvement Process & Results

In all, approximately 1,148 public comment entries were received. In addition to these public comments, approximately 36 entries were made from FWP staff in a comparable internal solicitation of comments. Despite multiple press releases, the open houses were only lightly attended by the public. The vast majority of comments were from Montana residents and addressed multiple issues and species. Most comments were unique inputs. Comments were at multiple, geographic scales (hunting district, region-specific, statewide). Comments have been forwarded to the Commission and regional staff for their consideration prior to drafting and reviewing formal season proposals. The October informational session with the Commission is to generally summarize these scoping results and to identify any Commission direction or emphasis prior to formal proposals being presented at the December 8 meeting.